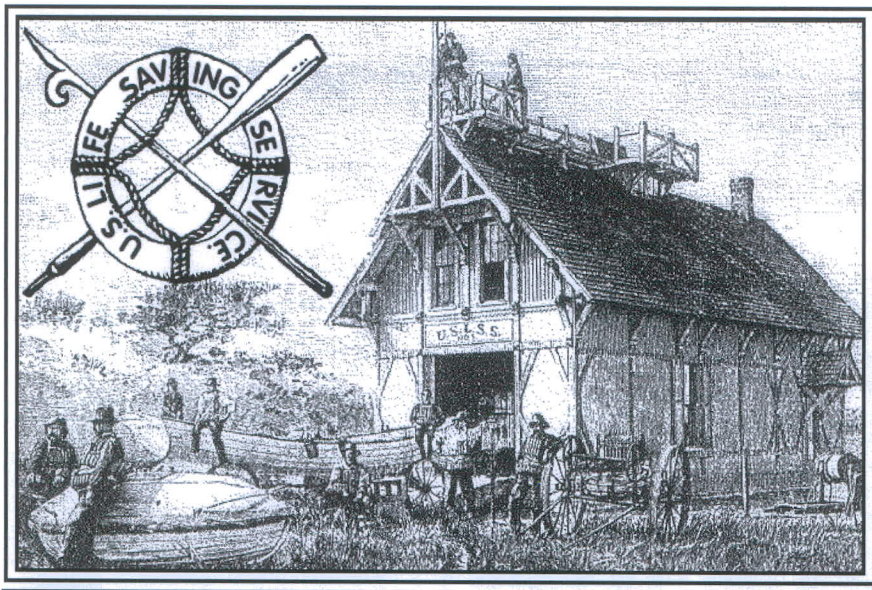
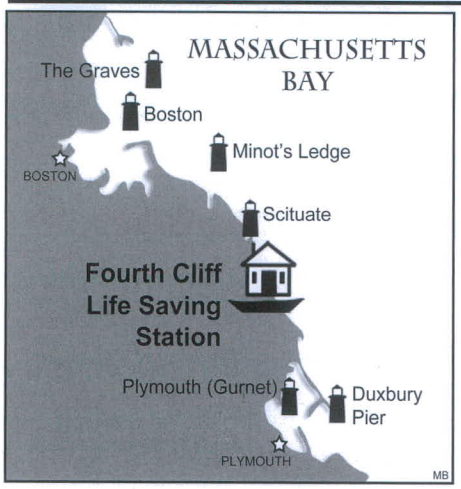
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OUR SISTER SERVICE

The U. S. Life Saving Service
1878-1915



Fourth Cliff, 1879

By John J. Galluzzo

The Fourth Cliff Life-Saving Station knew only two keepers during the Life-Saving Service era, John Smith and Fred Stanley. John Smith took the position on September 3, 1879, and left the service on September 22, 1880. That day, Frederick Stanley, who had joined the service as a surfman on January 18, took over as the head of the station. He held the position until March 22, 1915, for 35 years, retiring at the age of 70. Along the way, he saw a lot of shipwrecks, and he saved a lot of lives.

The first three numbered cliffs at Scituate, Massachusetts, were all thickly populated well before what is probably the most famous cliff of all, Fourth. When one examines the topography of the town of Scituate, it is easy to see why. Scituate's natural harbor sits north of First Cliff. First and Second Cliffs shield the landward approach to them across Edward Foster Road and the marshland it traverses. Third Cliff offers the same convenience with access via the Driftway. But Fourth Cliff has always stood alone.

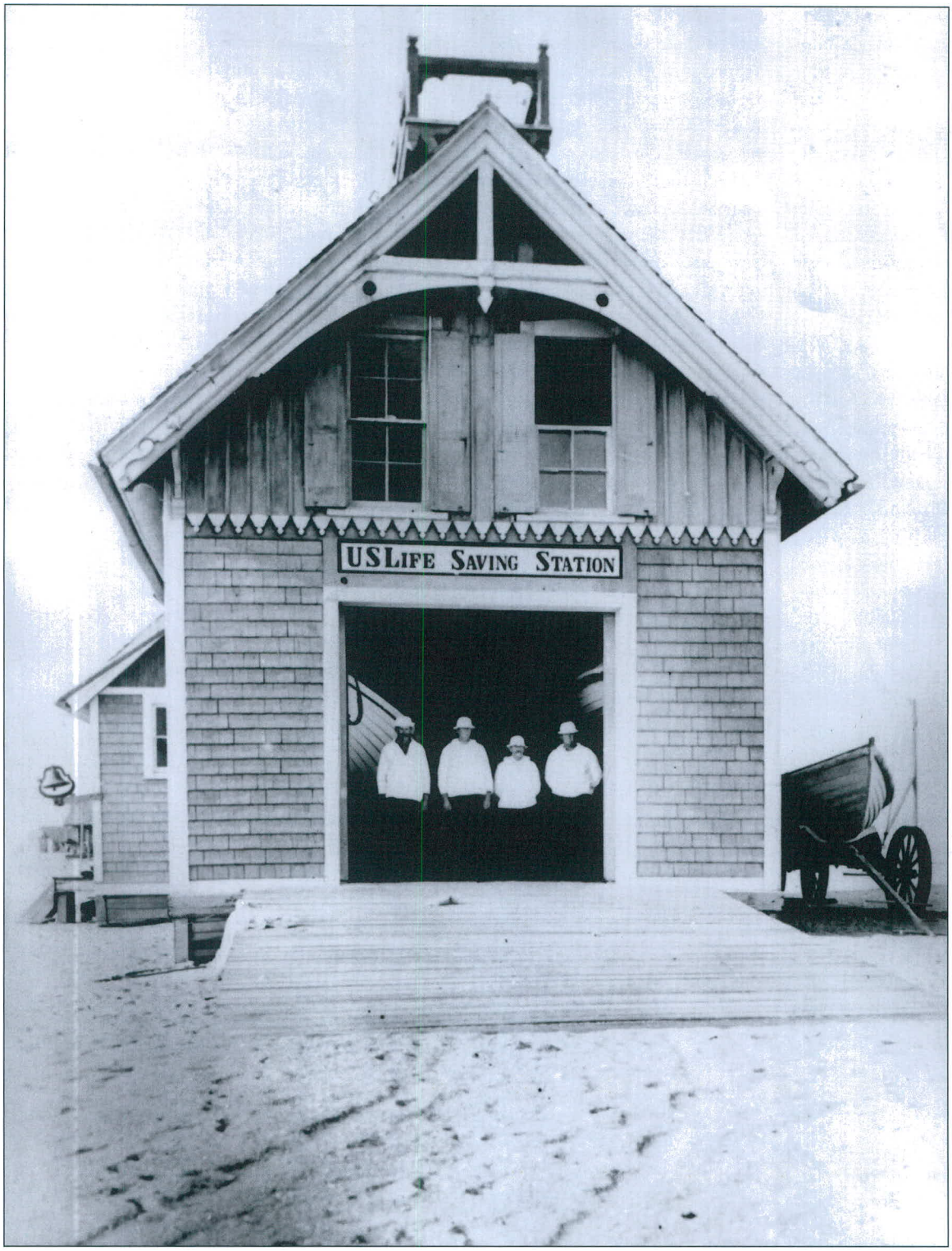
The fact was that when Scituate was settled, a beach connected the Third and Fourth cliffs, albeit in a tenuous way, and the rest of the land now known as Humarock was a southward reaching peninsula. It made no sense for Marshfield to claim it, for there was no landward approach to it from their town, with the North and South Rivers flowing out from between the southern end of the peninsula and Rexhame. The irony today is, of course, that for Scituate residents to get to Humarock by land they have no choice but to go through Marshfield. So, with no access from the Marshfield side, and limited access from the Scituate side, Fourth Cliff became a tough sell for farmers looking to till the Scituate soil.

One family, though, the Tildens, were up to the task, as generations lived on the cliff over the course of centuries. Nathaniel Tilden, who arrived on the *Anne* in 1623, built his house on Kent Street and soon became one of the wealthiest men around. "He had left a comfortable, not to say pretentious home in England for a rude dwelling here," said Harvey Hunter Pratt in *The Early Planters of Scituate*, "that he might obtain the greater spiritual solace of an unhampered devotional." Among his holdings were extensive parcels of saltmarsh inside "New Harbour," the basin inside Fourth Cliff.

The last Tilden homestead on Fourth Cliff was built in 1828, but the family would not be alone for much longer. The Humane Society of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts erected huts of refuge at Fourth Cliff in 1787 and 1857, leaving the latter in the care of John Tilden, who also had control of the society's lifeboat there as late as 1869.

Around this time, too, came an early boarding house. As described by Joseph Merritt in *Anecdotes of North River and South Shore*, looking from the Driftway toward the cliff "a lone two-story building and an old barn were for a long time the only structures to be seen. This was the Fourth Cliff House, one of the first summer boarding houses on the South Shore. Long before the days when summer people were coming in any number to Scituate and Marshfield, a few families who had discovered the place and liked the quiet were in the habit of spending their vacations there." William Merritt and his family arrived to run the Fourth Cliff House in 1879, catering heavily to shorebird hunters each spring and fall. That same year, the Life-Saving Service built its Fourth Cliff station at the southern end of the hill (it was known as "Scituate" until 1883, when the service changed its name to "Fourth Cliff").

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The Fourth Cliff Life-Saving Station in Scituate opened in 1879. Photo courtesy of Rochard Boonisar.

Born on January 27, 1845, in Boston, Fred Stanley lived the life of a typical lad of his era, educated in the city schools until 12 and then sailing off to sea as a cabin boy. "He followed the sea until he was twenty-three years of age," said the *Biographical Review for Plymouth County, 1897*, "circumnavigating the globe more than once, doubling Cape Horn and the Cape of Good Hope, and visiting the principal maritime countries of the globe. The harbors of London, Liverpool, Havre, Cronstadt, Calcutta, Australia, New Zealand and the Brazilian ports became almost as familiar to him as old Massachusetts Bay, and before he was 25 years old he was an all-round citizen of the world." Retiring from the sea, he took up fishing and Irish mossing in Scituate before joining the Life-Saving Service.

Irish mossing, an industry almost entirely confined to the coast of Scituate during the latter half of the 19th century, made good boatmen out of many of the town's young men. Rowing out two hours before low tide in flared 14-foot boats, Irish mossers reached over their gunwales with 16-foot rakes to drag chondrus crispus, a red algae, from the rocks below. Dried, Irish moss yielded carrageen, used as an emulsifier in many products, including beer in the mid-1800s. The industry drove Scituate's economy off and on for decades. A summer harvest, Irish moss allowed its gatherers to consider other work during the colder months. The schedule dovetailed perfectly with the lifesaving business, where everyone at the station besides the keeper took June and July off.

During his life at the station, Stanley assisted approximately 40 large vessels. Occasionally, the major rescues came in bunches. At 5:30 a.m. on February 11, 1888, a patrolman from the Fourth Cliff station saw a light well to the south of the end of his patrol through a blinding snowstorm. Unable to discern whether or not the light emanated from a ship, he returned to the station and informed Keeper

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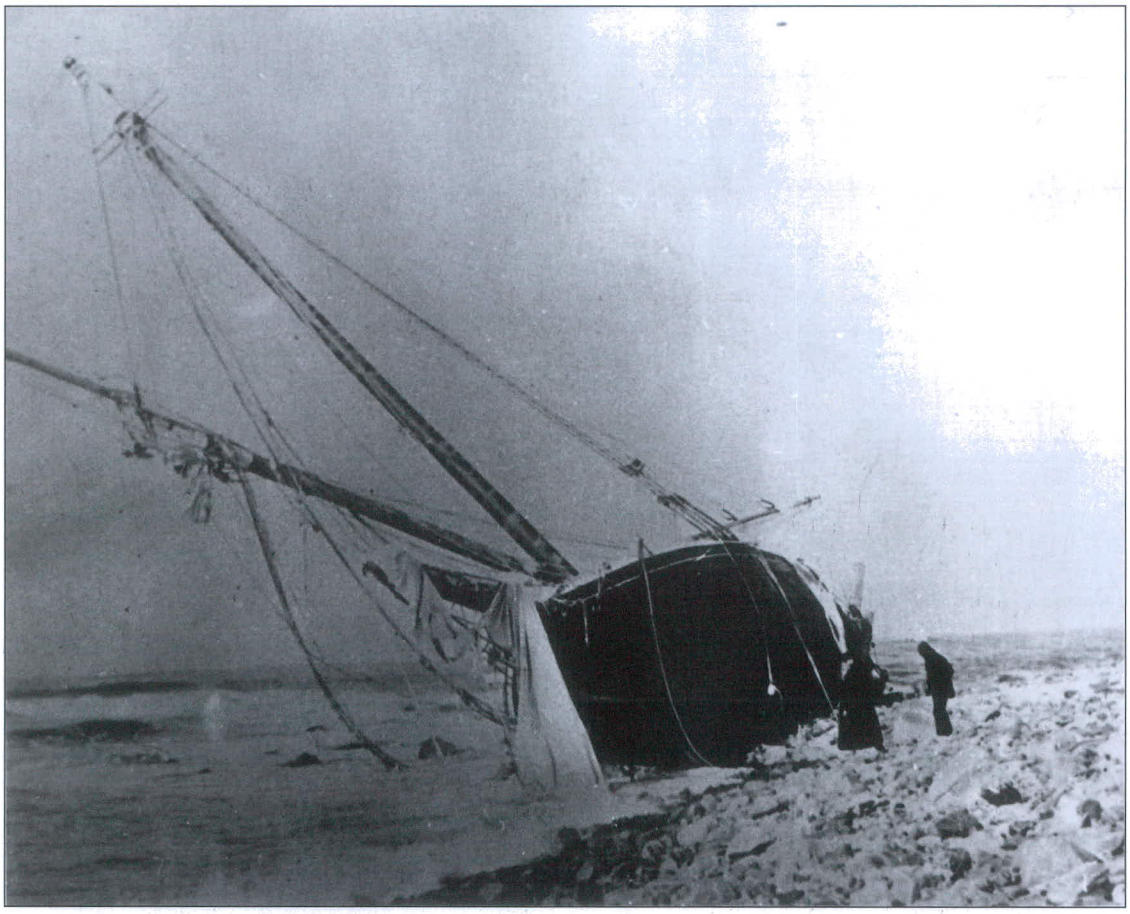
Stanley. Stanley headed south, and as the snow cleared, without doubt saw a schooner upon the beach at Hewitt's Point, four miles to the south of the station. Knowing the crew would never get their lifeboat to the scene through the ice floes moving offshore, he ordered it hauled by land south to the mouth of the North River at Rexhame. Getting into the boat, the lifesavers crossed to the Marshfield side and continued their trek southward, reaching the scene at 11 a.m. The local Humane Society crew had attempted a rescue but failed when ice overwhelmed their oars and thole-pins.

The ship's hull had been submerged by the frigid water and the crew had scampered into the rigging. With the beach frozen solid, the lifesavers could not dig a hole in which to place their sand anchor, a heavy wooden cross with a ring to which the shore end of the breeches buoy hawser would be attached, a crucial step in erecting the system. Instead, they buried it under the heaviest rocks they could find, hoping that would hold the anchor. Stanley aimed and fired the Lyle gun, needing only one shot to deliver the line into the grasp of the crew as their vessel began to break up. Each man stepped into the breeches, and one by one, the lifesavers pulled them ashore. According to the *1888 Annual Report of the Life-Saving Service*, "On no trip did the occupant of the buoy touch the water." The sand anchor held. Stanley later learned the name of the vessel; the *Agnes R. Bacon*, of Morristown, New Jersey, moving from New York to Boston with a load of coal.

Just four months later, the bark *Chattanooga* of New Haven stranded on nearly the same point of land. As the wreck occurred in late June, at a time when America's surfmen were off making a living on their own for two months, Keeper Stanley had to rustle up a crew. He found two of his regular surfmen and convinced five volunteers to join them in racing to the scene in the station's surfboat. Telegraphing for a tugboat to meet them at the scene, the crew rushed to the wreck. About 45 minutes after they arrived, the ship sank with its cargo of salt from Puerto Rico. Stanley and his makeshift crew brought the crew of nine and their single passenger ashore in the surfboat, transporting them and their luggage to the local train station, even using his influence to arrange for them free passage to the city. After returning the surfboat to the station, Stanley and his two surfmen headed back to the wrecked ship to protect it from potential illegal salvaging, staying aboard for two full days until the captain returned.

Five months later, in late November, Stanley witnessed what may have been the oddest incident in his entire lifesaving career. The dismasted Boston fishing schooner *Edward H. Norton*, drifting helplessly off Scituate with sixteen men aboard during a terrific late fall snowstorm, capsized, sweeping fourteen of the sixteen men to their deaths in the icy depths. Two men miraculously stayed with the ship as it wandered upside-down toward the shore, striking on First Cliff.

Surfman William H. Murphy spotted the wreck at 2 a.m. and found a body in the surf. Burning a Coston flare to determine whether or not others had survived the ordeal, he found nothing and returned to the station with the news. Keeper Stanley opted to wait until the south patrol returned to be sure no other ship needed immediate assistance. With no news coming in, Stanley took surfmen Marcus Barber and Joseph Flynn and headed for the wreck of the *Norton*.



The rescue of the crew of the schooner *Helena* added one more notch to Keeper Frederick Stanley's belt. 1909 photo courtesy of Richard Boonisar.

"We searched the beaches all along but could find no bodies," Stanley later wrote in his log. "About 8.30 two boys saw a stranger leaning over a wall who told them he came out of the wreck and there was another man in her. At the time could see no way to get under her so I got two axes and cut a hole through the bottom but could find no one." After the tide ebbed, the lifesavers did find someone, the captain, Frank Curran of Boston, entangled

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in trawl nets in the aft section of the boat. They took the body to the Scituate receiving tomb. The next day, four more bodies washed ashore. In late January three more identifiable as members of the crew floated in on the tide. In March two more arrived.

The list of vessels tended to by Stanley and his men grew through the years: the schooner *Bessie C. Beach*, drifting aimlessly from the North Shore after losing her rudder, tested the lifesaving crews piloting skills as they steered it close to the entrance to Scituate Harbor where a tug could pick it up; the schooner *Minnie Rowan* in February 1894 required three launch attempts in a lifeboat, finally saving eight crewmen, including a captain with a broken leg; and the schooner *Puritan* in December 1896, called for the rescue of six men by breeches buoy. On November 16, 1900, a man named John Monroe became stuck in the mudflats of the Herring River. Keeper Stanley launched a dory and rowed to his assistance. Offering an outstretched oar, Stanley pulled the man from hip-deep mud. On April 9, 1901, Stanley and his crew rescued five men from the schooner *George S. Boutwell*, named for the Secretary of the Treasury who had appointed Sumner Kimball to the position of Director of the Revenue Marine Bureau in 1871.

The station itself lived in danger. The Life-Saving Service moved it on its lot in 1893 as the "sea was making dangerous inroads" upon the land.

In 1905 Stanley quietly, celebrated his silver anniversary of service to the United States Life-Saving Service. Nine days later he turned 60 years old. Time would begin to catch up with him. Later that year, George H. Brown, keeper at the North Scituate station, his former protégé and later fellow keeper, left the service against his will, due to disability. But Stanley still had one major rescue effort in him.

On November 7, 1908, Surfman Number One Matthew Hoar left the Fourth Cliff station with a leg injury, unsure of when he would return. The following day, Keeper Fred Stanley returned to duty, himself having been out with an infirmity. He had some catching up to do. The crew had received a new Race Point surfboat in October, complete with masts and sails, and they needed to all be proficient in its use.

By late January Matthew Hoar had still not returned. On January 29, Stanley lost another of his longtime trusted surfmen, his number two, for an indeterminable amount of time. "At 8.15 a man came to the station with news that the mother of surfman W. H. Murphy had died, so I allowed him to go home," Stanley wrote in his journal.

The following morning, at 6:30, Surfman Number Six John Carson reported that a schooner had come ashore just to the north, under Fourth Cliff, breaking up the crew's breakfast. He also reported that he had burned three Coston flares in attempts to draw a response from the stricken ship. Stanley, who had turned 64 years old three days earlier, examined the vessel's position in the jagged rocks and determined that a breeches buoy rescue would be the best possible way to rescue the crew. "It was a wicked morning," he told the press. "We could just see the outlines of the schooner and could hear the breakers pounding on the shore all around her." The crew took the breeches buoy up the hill abreast the wreck and fired two shots with the station's Lyle gun. Both found their target, even in the darkness of the predawn hour, but the crew aboard the ship could not see them. As the light developed, the ships' crew found the second shot between the fore and main masts and hauled away. The breeches buoy was rigged, and, according to Stanley, they "soon had the 8 men of the crew ashore without any accident. Then cut the hawser and got all the gear back to the station at 11 a.m."

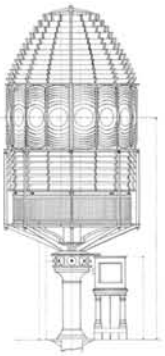
The *Helena* incident did not end there. The following day, the captain of the *Helena* fell out of his ship's rigging. "Surfmen [Dennis] Quinn and [Frank J.] Carlton with an outsider [James Ward] jumped in a dory and tried to get him but owing to the sea running around the bow were unable as every sea would sweep them back on the beach." Imploring the captain to let loose his grip on a rope to which he was holding, the surfmen left the safety of their dory and grabbed him as the sea swept him around the bow of the schooner. Stanley arrived on scene and ordered the man carried to the station, as he could not walk. Surfmen Marcus Barber and John Carson with six bystanders lifted him and transported him to the building. Following standard procedures, the keeper oversaw the removal of his wet clothes, his rubbing down, wrapping in warm blankets, and intake of hot drinks. The lifesavers "put him to bed with bottles of hot water round him and he soon fell asleep. In three hours he was all right again."

For the next week, the *Helena* and its scattered cargo of lumber consumed the daily lives of the keeper and crew. On February 8, "At 3 p.m. a man was brought into the station suffering with a bad wound on his foot, while trying to save lumber from the surf a fellow workman drove an icepick through his foot. We washed it clean and dressed it for him and he was carried home." Due to the abundance of lumber ashore, the crew could not practice the beach apparatus drill on the beach until March 11.

Fred Stanley served his country as a Life-Saving Service keeper until there was a Life-Saving Service no more. When the service merged with the Revenue Cutter Service in 1915, he took advantage of something most of the surfmen and keepers never had access to: a pension. He retired in March of 1915 as one of the most prolific lifesavers in the history of the service.

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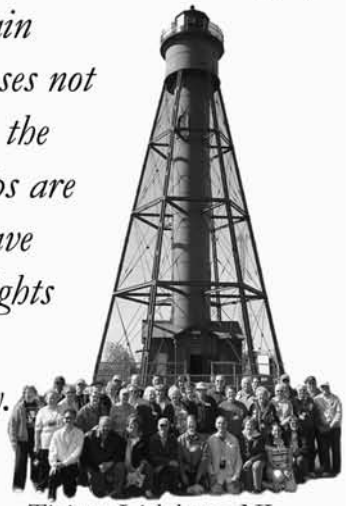
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